Chapter 28
'Smart' Project Management: Smartphone 'Apps' for Project Management

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ABSTRACT

Mobile devices and applications are changing the way individuals gather, process and share information. A development which also applies to project management. This chapter reports an explorative study on the functionality of 50 project management apps. The apps were analyzed on the variables: type of functionality, project management processes supported, methodology/standard supported, topics covered, website support, languages supported, project roles supported, number of team members supported and number of projects supported. Our analysis showed that the functionality of project management apps today is mainly focused on two application areas: (A) Supporting the role of the project manager individually in the planning/organizing processes of the project and (B) Supporting team communication and team collaboration. Lacking in functionality seems to be the communication/collaboration with project sponsor and other stakeholders. Based on our study we recommend project managers to be selective when starting to use project management apps.

INTRODUCTION

The process of how individuals gather, convert or share information is increasingly influenced by smartphone applications, better known as 'apps'. One needs only look at the sheer numbers of apps available in leading app stores, a number that reached approximately 1.6 million apps in 2015 (Wikipedia, 2015), to conclude that smartphones and tablets have earned their position as information processing devices. The shift to mobile apps when processing information has changed the landscape of information processing, even when most of the popular apps, such as games, entertainment or social media apps (Bushey,

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2013), are not aimed at professional use. The mobile accessibility of apps is quickly making them also the 'user interface of choice' for business professionals, when disclosing or creating information in their professional context,. It may be concluded that the shift to mobile applications and the related improvement in communication has been the result of the ease with which mobile devices can be accessed (Godwin-Jones, 2011).

Through providing access to online information at the tips of one's fingers (Brown & Chalmers, 2003), mobile devices and related apps provide great potential for business professionals and as such also for project managers. While many providers for project management support tools, such as Trello and Asana, offer their services as apps, studies have not yet explored the possibilities of professional apps specifically aimed at project management. The study reported in this chapter, explored and analyzed available apps for project managers. Using a structured approach, the study classified a selective sample of 75 apps on a classification framework that comprised of nine variables.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. The following paragraph reports the selection of apps for the study and describes the sample. Next, the third paragraph outlines the classification framework and its associated variables used for the assessment of app functionality. Paragraph four then presents the findings of the study. The chapter finalizes the study with conclusions and suggestions for further research in paragraph five.

The research advances existing research through the provision of insight in the app market specific to project management. This insight enables project managers and organizations to make more enlightened decisions regarding the use of apps in their work.

SELECTING PROJECT MANAGEMENT APPS

The operating system platforms for smartphones and tablets appear to be settling on IOS from Apple, Android from Google and, on some distance, Windows Phone from Microsoft. Figure 1 shows the number of apps available in the official app stores for these platforms.

The Google Play store has now over 1.6 million apps available, with an approximate number of downloads of over 70 billion (Wikipedia, 2015b). The number of apps available for the IOS platform is approximately 1.5 million, with over 75 billion downloads (Wikipedia, 2015). The Windows Phone store now has approximately 340.000 apps available (Statista, 2015) and in total some 3 billion downloads (Hachman, 2013). As the Windows Phone platform is clearly trailing the IOS and Android platforms, we focused solely on the latter two.

By entering the search term 'project management' in both the IOS app store and the Google play store, approximately 300 apps were identified in each store. However, several prominent apps do not include the word project management in their names, for example Basecamp. In order to also identify these apps, we searched for the term 'best project management app' in Google, from which we also selected apps which seemed relevant and were recommended to project managers. Based upon these searches, the number of downloads of the apps in the two stores and the evaluation of the apps in the stores, we selected 75 most prominent apps for our study. For practical reasons, we omitted apps that were not available in the English language. Table 1 presents the details of our sample, with the apps in alphabetical order.